

making the policy recommendations in the first place must also draft answers, thereby acknowledging a letter that can be a fertile source of new ideas or new perspectives. Other forms of written representation have less impact because it is recognized that too often signatures are appended to a document out of deference to the personal friendship of the promoter rather than out of a real understanding of and concern with the issue. Moreover the "whereas - therefore" protests seldom provide the policymaker with any indication beyond generalities of what subsequent policy should be if the recommended action is followed. A nationally-based but not obviously orchestrated expression of views in personal letters can carry the weight of the concerned public, but the Department is seldom the recipient of such united expressions.

Human rights

Taken apart from other forms of representation of individual opinion, the most effective policy-directed letter-writing has been in the field of specific human-rights violations and family-reunification, perhaps because the Government has a better chance of rectifying individual abuses and aberrations in a state's normal functioning in the human-rights field than when an alteration is sought in the very basis of another society's traditions or laws. Naturally, the Canadian case will be strongest when the offence is blatant and other states add their weight to the protest. A recent case is that of Soviet dissident Anatoly Shcharansky, who, on March 15, 1977, was arrested as a result of his activities with the Moscow group monitoring the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act. From June to December 1977, the Department received 35 requests for the granting of asylum in Canada, and 57 Parliamentarians sent a protest telegram to Brezhnev. Citing these representations and the fact that Shcharansky had relatives in Canada, Canadian officials told the Soviet Union that Canada would grant him landed-immigrant status. In the meantime, the Department has continued to receive a steady flow of representations concerning Shcharansky - 45 in January and 61 in February. Not all cases are so easy to follow through on, owing to the intricacy of foreign laws and complicated family entanglements that concerned Canadians are often not aware of at the time they make requests. When success is not quickly apparent, frustrated individuals may take their case to the public in the hope of mounting a formidable protest that will persuade the Government to make a public protest. The choice between private or public diplomacy is not an easy one, and

cases in which public pressure has caused a hardening of attitudes in foreign capitals rather than a meeting of minds are not unknown, since no government wishes to be accused of bowing to the whims of a foreign public.

Letters are often received on both sides of broader policy matters, as in the case of Canadian policy on recognition of the new Chilean Government and the admission of refugees during the winter of 1973-74. In December 1977 and January 1978, the written representations supporting the new South African policy were offset by 82 in disagreement. In cases such as these, obviously, the size and balance of the written representations would suggest that the Government look elsewhere for any decisive expression of public opinion. In any year, the vast majority of letters received do not show much concentration as to subject-matter. For example, in October 1977, the mailbag included single letters on Canada's attitude on Walvis Bay, a protest against the visit of Nkomo to Canada, a request for assistance in recovering money from a Romanian bank, a proposal for a Senegalese art exhibition in Canada, a demand for release of unionists imprisoned in Ecuador and a request for an emergency food shipment to Vietnam.

Apart from Canada's Rhodesian and South African policies, the only policy areas attracting more than ten representations were the Young Leaders '77 program and Canada's abstention in a vote in the International Civil Aviation Organization over observer status for the Palestine Liberation Organization. Their impact is a variable dependent upon a curious undefined balance of the quality, quantity and status of the purveyors of opinions that changes with each issue and each set of decision-makers. Certainly, in individual human-rights cases Government action would not always follow without a show of public interest. One of the best examples of the Department's sensitivity in this area was the protest by the Canadian Government to the Zambian Government after two Canadian girls were shot and killed while swimming in the Victoria Falls region in May 1973. The widespread Canadian public reaction to this case made an official protest to President Kuanda more meaningful because it had the credibility that is usually essential in persuading foreign governments to acknowledge protests. Another successful letter-writing impact on policy occurred in 1974, when, as a result of the number of letters received following a series of W5 television programs about mass starvation in Ethiopia, the Government decided to increase its emergency aid commitment.